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E-EDITION



House Dems try to unite on farm bill

By **MARY CLARE JALONICK**

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) -- House Democratic leaders have beaten back a challenge from their own party as they debate a multibillion-dollar farm bill that would continue subsidies for U.S. crops.

Now they must unite to pass it.

The House began debate on the bill Thursday and defeated an amendment by Rep. Ron Kind, D-Wis., to scale back government payments for farmers. Democrats must overcome Republican opposition to the bill, which would extend agriculture and nutrition programs for the next five years, as they attempt to pass the bill Friday.

Republicans who previously supported the legislation have said they would oppose it because of a tax on certain foreign-owned companies with U.S. subsidiaries. Those taxes would finance food stamps and other nutrition programs.

Facing the GOP revolt, leaders scrambled Thursday to sweeten the bill to please Democrats who were wavering. Changes included a boost for international nutrition programs.

Leaders touted the bill as an important step toward modernizing farm programs, even though it would leave in place and in some cases increase subsidies to producers of major crops at a time of record-high prices in farm country. It contains far less money for conservation and nutrition programs than many Democrats wanted.

"There is something in this bill for everybody to like.

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There's probably something in this bill for everybody not to like, but it's a step in the right direction," said Rep. Collin Peterson, D-Minn., the Agriculture Committee Chairman.

The White House has threatened to veto the measure, saying the legislation doesn't go far enough. Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns said it misses opportunity for overhauling the subsidy program.

The bill would ban subsidies to farmers whose income averages more than \$1 million a year. The limit is \$2.5 million - and stop farmers from collecting payments for multiple farm businesses. The bill includes some \$42 billion in assistance to farmers.

An administration proposal would go further, banning subsidies to farmers with incomes averaging more than \$200,000 and imposing stricter payment limits.

Thursday's showdown vote was on a proposal by Kind and conservative Republican Rep. Jeff Flake of Arizona that was closer to the administration's plan. The Kind amendment would have reduced subsidies in favor of conservation, aid for specialty crops like fruits and vegetables, and nutrition and rural development programs.

The current farm law, enacted in 2002, expires Sept. 30. The Senate is due to begin its consideration of the legislation in September.

Associated Press writer Julie Hirschfeld Davis contributed to this report.

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